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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that parliamentary debate provides a meaningful alternative for programs looking to offer debate components in their mission. The most important assumption in the paper is that comprehensive programs are valuable educational laboratories and require debate activities as part of their comprehensiveness; in fact, the comprehensive approach to forensics seems to be the best fit within the laboratory approach to forensics, given that students from such programs are able to develop a greater variety of skills than students participating within specialized programs. The paper asserts that the major strengths of parliamentary debate within a comprehensive forensics program are: (1) parliamentary debate affords a dialectical activity for individual events students; (2) parliamentary debate allows for development of analytical refutation skills in policy debaters; (3) parliamentary debate affords comprehensive forensics opportunities on a limited budget; (4) tournaments allow parliamentary debaters to participate in individual events; and (5) parliamentary debate allows students to experience growth in their advocacy skills. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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It Ain't All That Bad: The Parliamentary Format as a Viable Debate Alternative for Forensic Laboratories

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S. Jensen

Maybe we should begin with the title. I have been involved in CEDA debate since 1981 and have long been a proponent of the educational and competitive opportunities that CEDA activities avail to its participants. Then along came parliamentary debate and the National Parliamentary Debate Association. Because of some negative experiences associated with my regional exposure to parliamentary activities, I was a hard sell.

A few years and a more diverse exposure to parliamentary debate activities have helped me to reconsider my earliest attitudes regarding parliamentary debate. I am still committed to CEDA debate--now team policy debate in light of a greater NDT/CEDA sharedness. I have also developed a deep commitment for parliamentary debate as an equally valuable component in the overall forensics program.

This paper argues that parliamentary debate provides a meaningful alternative for programs looking to offer debate components in their mission. The assumption that is most important in this paper is that comprehensive programs are (1) valuable educational laboratories, and (2) require debate activities as part of their comprehensiveness.

The Comprehensive Forensic Laboratory

The benefits and drawbacks of comprehensive programs have been outlined in an extensive body of literature. (See, for example, Alexander, 1997; Backus, 1997; Biles, 1997; Burnett-Pettus and Danielson, 1992; Derryberry, 1996; Jensen, 1993;

Jensen, 1996; McGee and Simerly, 1997; Preston, 1997; West, 1997.) Integrated within the metaphor of laboratory, a comprehensive approach to forensics affords students a breadth of application and skills development. Indeed, the comprehensive approach to forensics seems to be the best fit within the laboratory approach to forensics, given that students from such programs are able to develop a greater variety of skills than students participating within specialized programs.

While research has suggested mixed results (Burnett-Pettus and Danielson, 1992; Jensen, 1993), there is reason to believe that a large percentage of forensics programs boast a comprehensive approach to the activity. While research on the nature of forensics programs has not been done over the past five years, it is safe to assume that the growth of parliamentary debate has helped to maintain the popularity of a broad-based approach to forensics. Increasingly tournaments that offer both multiple forms of debate and individual events do so within a schedule that hosts policy debate concurrently with individual events and parliamentary debate independent of the IEs. The message within the forensics community seems clear--policy debaters and individual event students do not share an interest in the others' activity. While this may be a discussion for another time, what is also clearly communicated by the way our tournaments have evolved is that parliamentary debate is the event that allows individual events and debate to compliment one another within the forensics laboratory.

Parliamentary Debate in the Forensics Laboratory

The second assumption in which this paper is grounded is that debate is an essential element within the comprehensive approach to forensics. Certainly individual events teach a wide variety of invaluable skills. Students who engage in a variety of genres of individual events benefit from a somewhat comprehensive approach to forensics. This comprehensiveness, however, limits itself in the argumentation, advocacy, and performance skills that are developed. The comprehensive program allows students to hone skills in a range of areas.

As has been argued, tournament structures have evolved in such a manner so as to make it almost impossible for some students to engage themselves in a comprehensive approach to forensics. One of my students participates in both policy debate and individual events. She has to nearly double her travel commitments in order to both debate and perform in her interpretation events. Parliamentary debate changes that. It is rare for a tournament that offers both parliamentary debate and individual events to schedule both concurrent with the other. Students who desire a broad-based approach to forensics are finding that parliamentary debate and individual events may be the best logistical combination of activities for them.

In light of these trends, this paper argues that parliamentary debate is a viable--and indeed valuable--alternative for forensics laboratories. Among the strengths of parliamentary debate within a comprehensive forensics program are

five that warrant further discussion.

Parliamentary Debate Affords a Dialectical Activity for Individual Events Students

Individual events allow students to master the development of a specific speech or performance of a specific program or piece of literature. Students who excel as individual events competitors generally take a great deal of time refining their event(s). With the exception of impromptu and extemporaneous speaking, the process of developing the individual event is one that takes place outside the competitive arena. Even impromptu and extemporaneous speeches are developed prior to their performance and seldom change within the actual performance.

Argumentation evolves. When I advocate a position and receive dissenting advocacy my inclination is to respond with a rejoinder. Debate allows messages to take shape within the competitive context. Adjudicators evaluate arguments in a broad-based manner, analyzing not only the arguments themselves, but how those arguments take shape within a dialogue of competing arguments. The framework of individual events prevents this type of exercise. Students who limit themselves to individual events do not experience the unique skills associated with the dialectic approach to argumentation. In this sense, parliamentary debate (and any debate format for that matter) extends the skills development of forensics students.

Parliamentary Debate Allows for Development of Analytical Refutation Skills in Policy Debaters

A nuance in parliamentary debate is the data and warrants

for arguments are largely the product of what a student can reason out absent specific evidentiary support. Information from various fields of argument (philosophy, politics, etc.) is generally used, actual printed materials are not allowed in parliamentary debate rounds. Students are forced to employ their evidence within a style of argument that emphasizes the debaters' original thinking. Policy debates encourage students to support arguments with evidence used in a verbatim fashion. While reasoned, original warrants are also encouraged in policy debate, the reliance on printed materials is a pronounced element in policy debate competition.

What I have found is that policy debaters benefit from the skills necessary in parliamentary debate rounds. The parliamentary style of argument is perfect practice for mitigating arguments and logically defeating competing claims. In some cases policy debaters may be uncomfortable with an argumentation activity that does not afford them the use of "blocks" or "cards" of evidence. What generally happens, and what happens in my program, is that policy debaters soon learn that arguing analytically is a critical tool in a successful policy debater's arsenal of skills. Likewise, my parliamentary debaters benefit from the arguments that policy debaters often make in practice parliamentary debate rounds. Seldom are parliamentary debaters forced to deal with well-developed disadvantages, workability arguments, and counterplans. In short, parliamentary debate serves not only to supplement

individual events, but other forms of debate as well.

Parliamentary Debate Affords Comprehensive Forensics Opportunities on a Limited Budget

Few forensics programs are able to say that they have too many resources. Increasing tournament costs continue to apply pressure to forensics programs. Comprehensive forensics programs face even greater resource pressures. A greater number of tournaments may have to be scheduled in order to allow students to experience competitive opportunities in their events. One or two coaches may be asked to coach all students in each of their events. Students may also be required to travel more extensively in order to receive exposure to both debate and individual events.

There are also costs associated with the events programs choose for their students. Policy debate brings with it unique resource pressures. Even programs who are active on a limited basis in policy debate are faced with costs including copying, materials, database access and computer capabilities. Some programs find that summer institutes are valuable sources of evidence, skills development, and theory. Likewise, tournaments that offer both individual events and policy debate are becoming the exceptions and not the rule.

While policy debate teaches important skills not developed within a parliamentary format, programs engage in policy debate at a price. For programs who are unable to absorb these additional resource pressure, parliamentary debate allows a sense of comprehensiveness. Most expenses associated with policy

debate are not necessary in parliamentary debate. With an increasing number of tournaments offering both parliamentary debate and individual events, programs are able to travel a more limited schedule and still make available broad-based competitive opportunities to their students.

Tournaments Allow Parliamentary Debaters to Participate in Individual Events

Parliamentary debate makes it much easier for programs to maintain a comprehensive philosophy of forensics within limited resources. As I have established, most tournaments that offer both parliamentary debate and individual events allow students to cross-over into each. Programs are able to travel to a limited number of tournaments and still provide a range of competitive opportunities to their students.

Certainly programs may ask students to prepare events they don't generally compete with at tournaments. These events may even be practiced. But the unique pedagogical value of the competitive arena is critical. Actually competing in a variety of events--both individual events and debate--is a critical component of a comprehensive approach to forensics.

Parliamentary Debate Allows Students to Experience Growth in Their Advocacy Skills

While the parliamentary debate framework disallows printed materials to be used in debates, it does encourage students to support their arguments. "Because I said so" is not considered compelling reasoning. The nature of support in parliamentary debate is the body of knowledge that can be found through a

liberal arts exposure to the world. Successful parliamentary debaters are well-read, conversant in philosophical models and ideas, and aware of the socio-economic realities of their world. Programs that participate in parliamentary debate are able to incorporate exposure to this information as part of students' event preparation. Requiring parliamentary debaters to learn a new philosophy or read a newspaper each day not only makes the students better debaters, but also encourages personal growth.

Such growth is not at all unique to parliamentary debate. Policy debaters must have a command of knowledge pertaining not only to the topic they are debating, but of philosophical models and current events. Extemporaneous and impromptu speakers enjoy more success as they are able to apply a breadth of knowledge to their speech development. Still, incorporating parliamentary debate into the forensics laboratory provides another outlet in which expansive personal knowledge is essential to competitive success. The presence of competing arguments in parliamentary debate makes this knowledge even more critical. Policy debaters can find and use additional pieces of evidence as support. Individual event students never receive vocalized opposition to their arguments. Parliamentary debaters must have a command of knowledge that is sufficient enough to develop and extend arguments throughout the course of a debate. These skills benefit all forensics students in any event--debate or individual event. In this sense, the personal growth necessary in parliamentary debate is an excellent supplement to other skills

taught within the comprehensive forensics program.

Some Drawbacks

All in all the reasons for supporting parliamentary debate within the comprehensive forensics laboratory outweigh any drawbacks. Still, there are some shortcomings for programs to acknowledge.

It has been my experience that students can view multiple forms of debate within a single program as competitive with one another. Many tournaments to not offer both parliamentary and policy debate. Having to schedule tournaments for policy debaters and parliamentary debaters creates a need to balance opportunities. One set of students may resent that other group is able to attend what they perceive to be a better tournament. Likewise, with a small coaching staff that shares all coaching responsibilities in all events, some students may feel that they are shortchanged because of a focus on one debate format over another. In short, educators whose programs participate in multiple debate formats must be aware of the need to present them as complimentary to one another.

The ideal solution is to travel only to tournaments that allow an entire squad to compete. While a wonderful goal, this is not always realistic. Even tournaments that offer a full range of events do so within concurrent schedules that forces coaches to devote their judging to one format over another. The team is also forced to participate within different structures, defeating the purpose of travelling as a comprehensive program.

The differences between debate formats, as well as between debate and individual events makes it difficult to balance work loads. Some of my students receive small scholarships. We make an effort to equalize what we expect students to do for their award. It is difficult to attain equity when some of our scholarship recipients are policy debaters, others are parliamentary debaters, and still others participate in only individual events. Add to the equation the students who participate in a debate format and individual events and the complexity of making expectations equitable becomes overwhelming. An effort must be made to achieve fairness in expectations, but at the same time not minimize the value of difficulty of an event.

Finally, there are some limits to what parliamentary debate teaches its participants. The unique benefits of exposure to policy debate--research, in-depth argument development, and becoming knowledgeable of a salient socio-political issue--are lost in parliamentary debate. There is not a perfect forensic event for teaching all that we would like our students to know. This reality is the best argument for a comprehensive approach to forensics. The fact that parliamentary debate does not teach all of the skills that are developed in other debate formats is not a reason to exclude parliamentary debate from a forensics program. It may, however, be a reason to supplement parliamentary debate with other debate activities that fill the voids associated with an exclusive focus on parliamentary debate.

Summary

To say that I was a hard sell on the values of parliamentary debate is an understatement. To now say that I am an advocate of parliamentary debate as a teaching tool for my forensics students is also an understatement. I have and will forever be an advocate of a comprehensive approach to forensics. I am also a realist. It is increasingly difficult for students to experience a breadth of forensics events without potential negative impacts on their academic pursuits, travel demands, and personal sanity.

Parliamentary debate, for many students, is a way of expanding a students' skills within a manageable forensics commitment. Sarah was a freshman last year. She was a person who resisted confrontation. She also had to experience a form of debate as a requirement of our program. After her first experiences in parliamentary debate Sarah became more outspoken, confident, and active than she had been prior to her debate experiences. For Sarah, parliamentary debate expanded the laboratory and helped her enjoy personal growth. There are many Sarahs in each of our programs. Supplementing our laboratories with parliamentary debate is a way to bring out the potential in each of our students, a goal worthwhile in the eyes of any forensic educator.

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